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SUBJECT: EMBASSY LONDON NOMINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMAN
OF COURAGE AWARD

REF: STATE 111471

11. (U) Summary: Post's nominee for the International Women of Courage Award is Farhat Khan. Farhat is an inspirational woman who experienced forced marriage and prolonged violence and abuse in Pakistan, escaped to the UK, and has used this experience to work -- often on a volunteer basis -- to support women experiencing violence or women seeking asylum from abuse in other countries. End Summary.

Farhat's Background: Forced Marriages, Domestic Abuse

12. (U) Farhat grew up in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, and entered into an arranged marriage to a man of her father's choice. Eventually, after years of abuse and fearing for her own safety and that of her three children, she left her husband and returned to live with her parents. Her parents felt the divorce had brought dishonor on the family, though they were aware of the violence. Against her family's wishes, Farhat started to work, focusing on helping women who were socially and economically disadvantaged. Her parents pressured her to remarry to restore the family's honor. Her second husband was from a wealthy family and was against Farhat working, but Farhat insisted on working. Her husband began to abuse both Farhat and her children. Her parents refused to take her back a second time, and her husband threatened to kill her if she left, so she felt she had no choice but to remain in the marriage. When Farhat's daughters were 5 and 7 years old, her mother-in-law had them engaged to her two other grandsons, who were then 15 years older than the girls and known for their violence. Farhat had no say in the forced marriages. Faced with the choice of living with the violence or of being killed if she left, Farhat took the brave yet difficult decision to escape Pakistan.

Farhat Escapes, Faces New Difficulties in the UK

13. (U) On landing at Heathrow Airport, Farhat and her children claimed asylum. Two months after they arrived, Farhat and her children were transferred to Manchester. Her first application was refused on the grounds that she could simply move to another part of Pakistan. She started actively campaigning against her deportation. She collected 10,000 signatures supporting her case. The immigration authorities expressed skepticism that a case of domestic abuse warranted asylum and advised her to submit a fresh application with substantial new evidence. After seven years of campaigning to stay in the UK, Farhat and her children were finally granted refugee status in 2007.

Farhat Uses Her Experiences to Help Others

14. (U) Prohibited from working while she was waiting for a decision, Farhat began volunteering as a way of using her

skills and doing something useful with her time. In 2005 Farhat set up Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST), a self-supporting group for women refugees in Manchester, and the first of its kind in the UK. WAST has opened a branch in London as well. WAST encourages women from cultures where they are pushed into the background to speak up and confront the issues they face as asylum seekers. The group is run by women, helping women feel more comfortable sharing their experiences.

¶5. (U) Farhat has passed on her skills and experience to others to do the daily running of WAST but she maintains a strategic and advisory role. She has worked as a university lecturer and currently is an Advice Worker at Manchester's Cheetham Hill Advice Centre where she supports and advises women who have experienced violence and abuse, especially ethnic minority women who, because of their insecure immigration status in the UK, have no recourse to public funds and limited access to protection, safety, and support. She has also contributed to the Testimony Project, which enables women to speak out about their experiences of seeking asylum.

Nominee Details

¶6. (SBU) Post has informed nominee about the IWOC award and she has given her permission to be nominated for the award.

Full Legal Name: Farhat Khan
Job title: Advice Worker, Cheetham Hill Advice Centre,
Manchester AND Founder Member, Women Asylum Seekers Together
(WAST)

DOB: 10 January 1952
COB: Pakistan
Citizenship: Pakistan
Address: 7 Oakhill Way, Cheetham Hill, Manchester M8 9EZ
Telephone: 44 161-7021156 (home) 44 161-7402461 (office)
Email: Farhat@cheethamadvice.org.uk
Passport Number: Currently unavailable
Languages: Pushto, Urdu, Punjabi, English

¶7. (U) London's point of contact for this award is Mark Rosenshield, RosenshieldMS@state.gov, 44 20 7894-0131.

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